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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to provide educators with information about reasons why college bound high school students are or are not interested in teaching as a career. Data collected from responses to questionnaires completed by 4,349 students were analyzed. Implications discussed in this report include: (1) The number of students expressing interest in becoming teachers is more than adequate to meet future needs; however, whether or not they are the best qualified or most committed is open to question; (2) Women will continue to make up the largest proportion of teachers; (3) Knowledge and skill in a subject area, interest in a subject area, and a desire to work with children or young adults are important factors in an interest in becoming a teacher; (4) Prestige and recognition, working conditions, friend or relative who is a teacher, and cost of education are not important factors to those expressing high interest in teaching; (5) Higher salaries are essential to attracting people into teaching; and (6) Attempts to attract people into teaching should take into account differences in interest which may be related to gender. Copies of the questionnaires are appended. (JD)

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Factors Related to High School Students' Interest in Teaching as a Profession

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FACTORS RELATED TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' INTEREST IN TEACHING AS A PROFESSION

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Background of Study

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1) issued a report entitled "A Nation at Risk". Probably no education report in the past decade has generated as much publicity as this document. Although "A Nation at Risk" addressed many issues regarding education, its comments related to the quality of our nation's teaching force has caused by far the greatest amount of publicity and discussion.

Specifically, the National Commission on Excellence in Education found "that not enough of the academically able students are being attracted to teaching; that teacher preparation programs need substantial improvement; that the professional working life of teachers is on the whole unacceptable; and that a serious shortage of teachers exists in key fields " (2). Since the issuance of this report, the Southern Regional Education Board (3), the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (4), and numerous other state and professional organizations have issued comparable reports with similar findings.

These critical examinations of the teaching profession are not novel. In fact, the profession has been a subject of concern for nearly a decade. Recently, these concerns have been the subject of intensified discussion and have received a great deal of media attention. As a result of this attention, it has become apparent that a major problem of the teaching profession is the low level of esteem in which it is held by the general public.

The esteem which the nation holds for teachers may well be summarized by citing a research investigation and a quote made by two educators. In the 15th Annual Gallup Poll of the public's attitudes toward the public schools (5), it was found: "In five surveys, beginning in 1969, respondents have been asked if they would like a child of theirs to take up teaching as a career. This year (1983), substantially more respondents were undecided than in earlier years when the same question was asked. The percentage giving a definite yes answer this year (45%) is slightly lower than in 1981 (46%) and substantially lower than in 1969, when 75% of all respondents said that they would like a child of theirs to take up teaching in the public schools as a career." Commenting on our nation's teaching force, Schlechty and Vance (6) state: "Teaching is not organized to promote lifetime career commitments among teachers. Salary schedules are truncated, and little opportunity for advancement exists within the ranks of teaching, since the teaching role is largely undifferentiated".

There is some research and unlimited opinion regarding who chooses teaching as a profession. Something of a void exists, however, in the area of why people choose teaching as a profession. There is an even greater lack of information regarding factors which may be related to people who do not select teaching as a profession. For example, do more females still choose teaching as a career than males? Is job security a key factor in one's choice of teaching as a career? Is salary a major reason why many college-bound students are not selecting education as a career? These and other related questions have been largely neglected by contemporary researchers. The study described in this monograph was

conducted in order to provide educators with information about some reasons why college bound high school students are or are not interested in teaching as a career.

How the Study was Conducted

This investigation had three major purposes. First, it sought to discern the level of interest in teaching as a career among college-track high school students. Second, in instances where students indicated they were "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in teaching as a career, the study attempted to ascertain factors related to this interest. Finally, if students were "not interested" in teaching as a career, information was gathered in an attempt to know why these students held such a viewpoint.

In order to identify a sample for this study, 23 schools in various states were contacted to determine their willingness to administer a set of questionnaires and return them to the researchers. In agreeing to participate, the schools and students participating in the study were assured anonymity by the investigators. This effort resulted in the selection of 21 high schools located in urban, suburban and rural areas of Pennsylvania, Arizona, Ohio, Minnesota, South Carolina and Texas. The schools included students of majority and minority groups from diverse socioeconomic status. Questionnaires were administered to over 5000 "academic/college-track" students in these high schools. The investigators, however, discarded several questionnaires for "procedural errors" committed by the students. Examples of these errors; circling 2 responses to an item, not responding to several items on the questionnaire, not writing their names, etc. Questionnaires from a total of 4,349 "academic/college-track" 11th and 12th grade students were used in this study. Of this sample, 2,197 were males and 2,152 were females.

Three questionnaires were employed in this investigation. These instruments were developed on the basis of previous studies conducted in areas relative to this investigation and on the basis of current literature dealing with problems in the teaching field, e.g., inadequate salaries, little respect for the teaching profession, etc.

These questionnaires were designated A, B, and C*. Questionnaire A was administered to all 11th and 12th grade academic/college-track students in a participating high school. This instrument asked students to respond to the statement: "Concerning teaching as my choice of a profession, I am - very interested, somewhat interested, have no opinion, or not interested."

Students who responded either "very interested" or "somewhat interested" on Questionnaire A were asked to complete Questionnaire B. This instrument's purpose was to ascertain the factor(s) related to the indicated interest. Questionnaire B contained 12 statements and students were asked to respond if a particular item was a "very important", "important", or "not important" influence on their interest in teaching as a profession.

When students stated on Questionnaire A that they had "no opinion" or were "not interested" in teaching as a career, they were administered Questionnaire C which also contained 12 statements. Students were to indicate on this questionnaire if a factor was a "very important", "important", or "not important" influence on their lack of interest in teaching as a profession.

Data from the study were compiled in terms of the number and percentage of responses to each item on the three questionnaires. These data were then analyzed as follows:

1. The number and percentages of males and females as well as the total sample who were "very interested", "somewhat interested",

* Copies can be found in Appendices

or "not interested" in teaching as a career;

2. The items which received the highest percentage of "very important" responses; those with the lowest percentage of "very important" responses; the items on which there was a considerable difference in the responses of males and females; and, those items with high percentages of "not important" responses.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Table A shows the respondents' general interest in teaching as a profession.

TABLE A

DEGREE OF INTEREST IN TEACHING BY SEX (N=4349)

Degree of Interest	Males		Females		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Very Interested	107	5	283	13	390	9
Somewhat Interested	493	22	648	30	1,141	26
No Opinion	361	17	336	16	697	16
Not Interested	1,236	56	885	41	2,121	49
	2,197	100%	2,152	100%	4,349	100%

Table B presents findings relative to those respondents who indicated that they were "very interested" or "somewhat interested" in teaching as a profession.

TABLE B

FACTORS RELATED TO INTEREST IN TEACHING AS A PROFESSION FOR STUDENTS EXPRESSING AN INTEREST IN TEACHING (N=1531)

	Item	%
Items receiving HIGHEST percentage of "very important" responses	Item #4 - "Your knowledge and skill in the subject you would teach."	76%
	Item #1 - "Your interest in the subject you would teach."	68%
	Item #11- "Your desire to work with children or young adults."	64%
Items receiving LOWEST percentage of "very important" responses	Item #7 - "The prestige and recognition associated with the teaching profession."	18%
	Item #2 - "Working conditions (hours, vacations) of teachers."	31%
	Item #9 - "Someone you know (relative or friend) who is a teacher."	34%
	Item #12- "The cost of college preparation for teaching."	35%
Items receiving HIGHEST percentage of "not important" responses	Item #9 - "Someone you know (relative or friend) who is a teacher."	40%
	Item #7 - "The prestige and recognition associated with the teaching profession."	36%
Response differences by sex	Item #8 - Sixty-two percent of the females, compared with forty percent of the males, indicated that "The security of teaching as a profession" was"very important."	
	Item #11- Seventy-three percent of the females, compared with fifty percent of the males, indicated that "Your desire to work with children or young adults" was"very important."	
	Item #9 - Forty-five percent of the females, compared with fourteen percent of the males, indicated that "Someone you know (relative or friend) who is a teacher" was"very important."	

Table C presents findings relative to those respondents who indicated that they had "no opinion" or were "not interested" in teaching as a profession.

TABLE C

FACTORS ATTRIBUTING TO STUDENTS' LACK OF INTEREST IN TEACHING AS A PROFESSION (N=2818)

	Item	%
Items receiving HIGHEST percentage of "very important" responses	Item #1 - "Considerably better salaries for teachers."	60%
	Item #6 - "More rapid salary increases for teachers."	56%
	Item #5 - "Better chances for professional advancement for teachers."	54%
Items receiving HIGHEST percentage of "not important" responses	Item #8 - "If teaching were a twelve months job with related higher salary."	41%
	Item #11- "Stricter requirements for beginning and completing college preparation for teaching."	33%
Response differences by sex	Item #9 - Fifty percent of the males, compared with seventeen percent of the females, indicated that "Improved prestige and recognition of the teaching profession" was"very important."	
	Item #10- Fifty-six percent of the males, compared with twenty-eight of the females, indicated that "Better working conditions (class size and discipline)" was"very important."	
	Item #7 - Fifty-six percent of the females, compared with thirty percent of the males, indicated that "Better chances of getting a teaching position in a geographic area of your choice" was"very important."	

Implications

1. A relatively small percentage (9%) of the sample in this study indicated that they were "very interested" in teaching as a profession. This figure, however, rose to nearly 35% when the two categories, "very interested" and "somewhat interested", were combined. On the basis of this latter figure, it would appear that the number of students interested in becoming teachers is more than adequate to meet the needs of the profession.

   These data raise several pertinent questions. First, while approximately 1/3 of the respondents in this study indicated some level of interest in teaching as a profession, does this group represent the population best qualified for teacher training and to assume teaching positions? Second, what steps need to be taken to have members of the population who are "somewhat interested" in teaching make a commitment to enter teaching? Finally, to what extent are we interested in recruiting into teaching members of the population who indicated that they were "not interested" in the profession? Data from this study should be helpful in designing efforts which could attract members of this population into teaching.

2. It would appear from findings in this study that women will continue to make up the largest proportion of teachers in the education workforce. In our investigation, women represented more than twice the percentage of men who indicated that they were "very interested" in teaching as a profession. Since in the past more men than women have taught science and mathematics at the secondary level, this finding would suggest a continued shortage of teachers in these areas.

3. For those respondents who indicated some level of interest in teaching, three factors appear to be particularly important to this interest. These factors are knowledge and skill in a subject area, interest in a subject area, and a desire to work with children or young adults. These findings suggest that teacher preparation programs which emphasize a strong content major and early field-based experiences should be effective in attracting and retaining selected groups of students, with the interest described above, to teaching.
4. Those who showed an interest in teaching also indicated that selected factors were not particularly important influences on their interest. These were prestige and recognition, working conditions, friend or relative who is a teacher, and the cost of college preparation. These findings could provide an important information base when it comes to promoting the teaching profession with young people.
5. There are considerable differences in the perceptions of teaching as a profession between respondents who indicated they were interested in teaching as a profession and those who indicated they were not. For instance, respondents who indicated that they were interested in teaching also stated that the factors which were "very important" related to this interest were in the areas of knowledge, skill and interest in a subject area, and a desire to work with children or young adults. On the other hand, respondents who stated that they were "not interested" in teaching as a profession indicated salaries and professional advancement as "very important" factors which could influence their interest in teaching. This finding supports other reports and general opinions that higher salaries are essential to attracting people into teaching who would otherwise not enter the profession.

6. For those respondents who did not indicate an interest in teaching, two factors were found to be low in importance. These factors were: teaching as a twelve month profession with related higher salary, and stricter requirements for preparation in order to become a teacher. This finding suggests that efforts to recruit teachers from this particular population should not focus attention on these areas.
7. A relatively low percentage of students in both the interested and not interested categories responded that prestige and recognition associated with teaching were important. It is impossible to determine from the data, however, whether these responses mean that prestige and recognition were not important or whether respondents simply perceived teaching as a profession which carries little prestige or recognition. It is interesting to note that among the group that responded that they were "not interested" in teaching, 50% of the males compared with only 17% of the females indicated that prestige and recognition were "very important". This could suggest a critical area for consideration in attracting people into teaching.
8. Several items on Questionnaires B and C suggest considerable differences between what males and females report as "very important" factors related to their interest in teaching. For instance, in the group composed of respondents indicating that they were "not interested" in teaching as a profession, 50% of the males compared with 17% of the females responded that prestige and recognition associated with teaching were "very important" factors influencing

their interest in teaching. Also, 56% of the males compared with only 28% of the females in this group responded that better working conditions in teaching was a "very important" factor. On the other hand, 56% of the females compared with 30% of the males responded that better chances of getting a teaching position in a geographic area of your choice was "very important".

For the group composed of respondents indicating some level of interest in teaching as a profession, 62% of the females compared with 40% of the males responded that the security of teaching was "very important", and 73% of the females compared with 50% of the males responded that their interest in working with children and young adults was a "very important" factor influencing their interest in teaching. These findings suggest that any attempts to attract people into the teaching profession should take into account differences in interest which may be related to sex.

Closing Thoughts

This study originated as an effort to gather descriptive data about why high school students are or are not interested in teaching as a profession. The study was conducted on a limited scale in terms of the population involved and the variables investigated. Since the culmination of this investigation, education has received a tremendous upsurge in national attention from politicians, educators and the public-at-large. This attention has brought to the fore a number of topics which could have been incorporated into this study. For instance, how do high school students feel about the concepts of merit pay, scholarships for studying to become mathematics or science teachers, bonus pay for teachers in selected areas, etc., and how would these concepts influence their interest in becoming teachers?

While the investigators suggest that data from this study should be interpreted and applied with caution, they do feel that the study produced findings which should be helpful in current and future attempts to develop programs for the recruitment of teachers. The study should also provide a basis for subsequent research into this important dimension of education.

REFERENCES

1. National Commission on Excellence in Education. "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform". Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education, April 1983.

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3. Task Force on Higher Education and The Schools. Meeting The Need for Quality: Action in the South. Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board, 1983.

4. Ernest L. Boyer. High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983.

5. George H. Gallup, "The 15th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Schools", Phi Delta Kappan, September 1983, p. 43.

6. Philip C. Schlechty and Victor S. Vance, "Recruitment, Selection, and Retention: The Shape of the Teaching Force", The Elementary School Journal, March 1983, p. 478.

APPENDICES

Questionnaire A

Name _____ Grade Level _____

We are interested in learning about high school students' interests in teaching as a vocation. To help us gather this information, would you please:

1. put your name and current grade level on the lines at the top of this sheet;
2. indicate your interest in teaching as a profession by completing the item below.

Please check <u>one</u> item from the list below.

Concerning teaching as my choice of a profession, I am

- very interested ☐
- somewhat interested ☐
- have no opinion ☐
- not interested ☐

Questionnaire B

ame _____ Grade Level _____

The second part of our survey asks you about some things that might be related to your interest in teaching as a profession. Please circle the appropriate number (1, 2 or 3) to indicate if each of the following items is a very important (1), important (2), or not important (3) influence on your interest in teaching as a profession.

		very important	important	not important
1.	Your interest in the subject you would teach.	1	2	3
2.	Working conditions (hours, vacations) of teachers.	1	2	3
3.	Your expected salary as a teacher.	1	2	3
4.	Your knowledge and skill in the subject you would teach.	1	2	3
5.	The availability of jobs in the teaching professions.	1	2	3
6.	Opportunities for professional advancement in teaching.	1	2	3
7.	The prestige and recognition associated with the teaching profession.	1	2	3
8.	The security of teaching as a profession.	1	2	3
9.	Someone you know (relative or friend) who is a teacher.	1	2	3
10.	Your desire to serve others.	1	2	3
11.	Your desire to work with children or young adults.	1	2	3
12.	The cost of college preparation for teaching.	1	2	3

Questionnaire C

Name_____ Grade Level_____

In this part of our survey, we are interested in learning about things that might cause you to be interested in teaching as a profession. For each item below, circle the appropriate number (1, 2 or 3) to indicate if the item would be a very important (1), important (2) or not important (3) influence on your interest in teaching as a profession.

		very important	important	not important
1.	Considerably better salaries for teachers.	1	2	3
2.	Better opportunities to get a teaching position in a subject area of interest to you.	1	2	3
3.	Teacher salaries based more on performance than on seniority.	1	2	3
4.	Better student respect for teachers.	1	2	3
5.	Better chances for professional advancement for teachers.	1	2	3
6.	More rapid salary increases for teachers.	1	2	3
7.	Better chances of getting a teaching position in a geographic area of your choice.	1	2	3
8.	If teaching were a 12 month job with related higher salary.	1	2	3
9.	Improved prestige and recognition of the teaching profession.	1	2	3
10.	Better working conditions (class size and discipline).	1	2	3
11.	Stricter requirements for beginning and completing college preparation for teaching.	1	2	3
12.	Better chances for a scholarship or other financial aid to help you prepare for teaching as a career.	1	2	3